

## BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY, 1919-39

her troops nor build fortifications. The wider programme envisaged a discussion, by the five members of the defunct Locarno system, of the status of the Rhineland and mutual assistance pacts, followed by a world conference, under the auspices of the League, to consider questions of security, armaments and economics.

It was an ambitious project, which travelled far beyond the purposes of Hitler. His counter-proposals of March 31 promised not to increase his troops in the Rhineland for four months, offered a twenty-five years non-aggression pact for France and Belgium, and reiterated his readiness to return to the League. The proposals of the Locarno Powers for an international police force and for keeping the Rhineland zone unfortified were ignored. A British note of May 6 in the form of a *questionnaire* invited him to supply explanations on certain points and to give an assurance that he would respect the *status quo* till it was modified by free negotiation, but no reply was received to a document breathing distrust of his sincerity. The attempt to create a new system of security with German aid was abandoned, and each party went his way. Hitler's declaration that the era of surprises was over brought little comfort, for the choice between guns and butter had already been made. He proceeded to construct the Siegfried line, while England and France drew ever closer together. On December 4, 1936, Delbos, the French Foreign Minister, announced that France would help England and Belgium if they were attacked. England had promised France assistance at Locarno and again in March 1936 without reciprocity. This anomaly was at length removed. A further difference between the Locarno system and its successor was the announcement on October 4, 1936, by King Leopold that Belgium would

defend herself if attacked, but would not fight  
for England or  
France. The desire of a sorely-tried country to  
keep out of  
future conflicts was fully understood by the  
Western Powers,  
who promised to aid her in case of unprovoked  
aggression  
without asking her aid in return. The Locarno  
period was  
over, and an Anglo-French defensive alliance  
took its place.

In a carefully considered declaration at  
Leamington on  
November 20, 1936, Mr. Eden defined our  
obligations and  
attitude after the agitations and confusion of  
recent months.  
Our arms would never be used for aggression  
or for any  
purpose inconsistent with the Covenant or the  
Pact of Paris.  
They would be used in the defence of our  
Empire, in defence